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*David W. Wright*

## **Opinion Letter to the Editor**

### **Climate Action and the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day**

*Public transportation in Northwest Indiana is uniquely positioned to continue providing our communities with environmental benefits and energy savings.*

**Gary, IN...**(April 21, 2020) With the 50th anniversary of Earth Day upon us, there is one silver lining of Covid-19: carbon emissions from fossil fuels could fall by 2.5 billion metric tons this year—the largest drop on record, according to earthday.org. Public transportation in Northwest Indiana is uniquely positioned to continue providing our communities with environmental benefits and energy savings needed to sustain this trend.

The first step to reducing our carbon footprint is to understand it. Transit in NWI reduces traffic by 33 million miles each year. With 17 stops from 5th Avenue in Gary down to Methodist Hospital in Merrillville, up to 10 percent of Broadway travel is via public transportation with the Gary Public Transportation Corporation (GPTC). This transit reduces pollution by up to 6,100 tons per year.

To further reduce carbon emissions, GPTC's plan is to buy four electric vehicles for the Broadway Metro Express, our busiest route and NWI's first "Rapid Bus" service. These new buses will substantially reduce diesel emissions and help us improve our air in Northwest Indiana. A state grant from the Indiana Volkswagen Environmental Mitigation Trust Fund Committee, intended to reduce diesel pollution in Indiana, will help pay for the new electric-powered buses.

Funding for transit is essential to allow more people to reap benefits of cleaner air and mobility choice. According to The American Public Transportation Association, "Communities that invest in public transit reduce the nation's carbon emissions by 37 million metric tons annually."

GPTC has installed energy-efficient lighting at the Metro Center, and lighting for Broadway Metro Express bus stations are all solar-powered. This year, we will be installing solar panels at our Maintenance Facility west of Grant Street in Black Oak. That goes a long way toward keeping our air clear.

Recently presented the 2019 NIRPC Green Fleet Member of the Year Award, GPTC was recognized as a South Shore Clean Cities Green Fleet member, standing as an example for others in actions and commitments to sustainable practices.

Looking forward, GPTC is well positioned to be part of NWI's expanding transit initiatives to decrease the brain drain (people can't ride where buses don't go!). Millennials drive less and use transit more than previous generations. According to the National Household Travel Survey—the federal government's periodic, detailed survey of transportation behavior in the United States—the average number of vehicle-miles traveled by young people decreased from 10,300 miles to 7,900—a drop of 23 percent.

In 2020, GPTC will be programming routes onto popular mobile mapping platforms to allow riders to plan their trips – including route selection, boarding times and transfers – from their phones, tablets or computers. At GPTC the future holds an expansion of our services to under-served areas and improved connections to our trains.

At the end of the day, we serve the good people who ride public transportation and the ones who are interested in decreasing carbon emissions and pollution.

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*GPTC provides fixed-route transit in Gary and nine other communities in Northwest Indiana. GPTC also provides complementary curb-to-curb paratransit service to those who are, due to a disability, unable to use its fixed-route service. Follow GPTC on Twitter (@GaryTransit) and on Facebook (keyword "GaryTransit") for service alerts and announcements. Call 219.884.6100 x 0 or message the GaryTransit Facebook page for any questions.*